HUMANUS DISCOURSE Vol. 6. NO 3. 2026
ISSN 2787-0308 (ONLINE)

Entrepreneurship and Government Intervention in Nigeria: A Historical Perspective

Ben Oramalugo
Retired Assistant Comptroller General
Nigerian Customs Service
Nigeria

Abstract

The need to promote entrepreneurship development has been one of the development goals of successive governments in Nigeria since independence. The strategy was pursued as a means of promoting socioeconomic development and of reducing unemployment as well as creating new investment opportunities. The impact of entrepreneurship development has been widely viewed by scholars through the theoretical lens. Yet only little attempt has been made to analyse government intervention in entrepreneurship development from a historical perspective. This paper therefore examines the role of Nigeria government in entrepreneurship development. It argues that a government policy or programme on entrepreneurship development when properly implemented can lead to entrepreneurship development, which in turn results in economic growth, employment generation and sustainable development. However, the gains from such government efforts in the country have not been maximised due to several challenges including; bad governance, insecurity and harmful cultural practices; faulty designs of some of the programmes; corruption and over concentration of these programmes in urban areas; among others. It concludes that government support for entrepreneurship development in Nigeria is no longer an option but an imperative to meet its development challenges.

Keywords: entrepreneurship, Nigeria, Development, History

Introduction

Entrepreneurship is the act of starting and managing a business. It is an economic development strategy that has been recognised across the globe as a key driver of economic growth[1]In other words, entrepreneurship has become very vital to the development of any national economy today, particularly because it provides employment opportunities, contributes to Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and creates new investment opportunities. It is not surprising that governments around the world including Nigeria, have adopted entrepreneurial development as a cardinal programme and also a means to achieving economic growth and development.While some scholars have analysed the effects of entrepreneurial development from a theoretical perspective, we still lack a sound understanding of how it evolves and how national policies create space for its development from a historical perspective. It is with this rather neglected aspect that this paper is chiefly concerned.

[1] Stephen, Hill, Friedl Chrisian, Guerrero, et al. *Global Entrepreneurship Monitor 2024/2025 Global Report: Entrepreneurship Reality Check* (London: GEM, 2025)

© humanusdiscourse@gmail.com , http://humanusdiscourse.website2.me

It aims to capture the effects and actions of the government in facilitating and hindering entrepreneurial development in post-colonial Nigeria.

Entrepreneurship in Pre-colonial Period

Entrepreneurship is not a new concept in traditional African settings; it is more a matter of terminology. It may not have been called by that name, but it was a clear practice in African societies, especially in Nigeria, where people were self-reliant and inventive. Entrepreneurship began when individuals produced more goods than they needed. As a result, there arose a need to exchange these surpluses. For example, a farmer might exchange his farm produce for meat from a hunter or for tools from a a blacksmith.

Through this, producers realised they could specialise in certain areas, generate more, and trade it for what they needed. This practice was known as the "Trade by Barter system." in pre-colonial Nigeria, the Hausas, Igbos, Yorubas and Benin all had their entrepreneurial skills that exposed them to opportunities even outside their native areas. Hausa people have a long identifiable history of entrepreneurship dated from the 11th century with Kano city being their entrepreneurship hub. With the introduction of "cowry shells as currency" as a result of a problem with the exchange of surpluses, led to family occupational specialisations that created family based entrepreneurship in Hausa land as families came to realise that they can concentrates in their areas of production or occupation to produce more and sell to others.[2]

Consequently, many families specialised in farming, mining and others in craftwork like blacksmithing, pottery making, carpentry, wool making, tannery, textile, dyeing, trading etc. The Hausa entrepreneurial ecosystem was built based on family business that involves family occupational apprenticeship to train and develop future family entrepreneurs. Indeed, the Hausas were infamous for their wide-ranging itinerant trading, and wealthy merchants shared the highest social positions with the politically powerful and the highly educated. In pre-colonial Hausa land, commerce like agriculture and cotton weaving was a profession. Many people live by it, and in almost every commodity there were specialists.[3]

The Igbos were specialised in buying and selling of goods and have perfected their entrepreneurship expertise in inventory control, management and distribution. Occupational diversity was a common characteristic of Igbo economy with various communities celebrated for farming, fishing, hunting and some for their artisan skills, such as pottery making, woodcarving, textile weaving as well as blacksmithing or metal work.[4] The Igbo manufactured a wide range of items which include – agricultural tools, war implements, various kinds

[2] Saidu, Nasiru. Development of Socio-Cultural Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Theory: Evidence from Three Major Ethnic Groups in Nigeria, Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo," *Journal of Business Administration and Entrepreneurship,* vol. 1, no.1(2024):9.
[3] Attahiru, Ahmad. "The Nature of Pre-Colonial Economy of Hausaland and Borno: Subsistence Economy Thesis Revisited," International Journal of Arts and Sciences, vol. 8, no.1(2015): 613
[4] Benjamin Uchenna A. "Precolonial Guild System in Igboland: The Example of Awka Blacksmith Guilds," *RUN Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol.2, 2018.

of baskets, clothes, earthen jars, household furniture and so on.[5] Some of the crafts which produced these wares could be practiced by anybody but some were practiced only by select communities, either because only them had the necessary raw materials or the crafts demanded more time than could be combined with full scale farming.

The Yorubas were predominantly town dwellers who practised small-scale, domestic agriculture and are well known as traders and crafts people. A distinct character of the Yoruba entrepreneurship is that members of the society were introduced to work from childhood.[6] They are identified with entrepreneurial practices such as agriculture, production of farm instruments, artifact, decoration ornament, praise singers etc.[7] Agriculture has been the fundamental entrepreneurial sector in Yoruba land with the second being the art craftmanship, as they have strong tradition of art and creative heritage. Since the 13th century, Yoruba artists have been producing masterpieces of woodcarving and bronze casting and enterprising through their creative culture in artifact, decoration ornament and singing.[8]

In pre-colonial Nigeria, craft guilds were the backbone of artisanal production, serving both as economic institutions and custodians of cultural heritage. The term guild has been defined as an association of merchants or craftsmen who exercise either by some specific delegation of authority to them or certain officially recognised powers of control over the occupation they follow.[9] Craft guilds regulated production quality and apprenticeship systems. For example, Benin's brass casters and Igbo blacksmiths operated under guilds that ensured skill transmission and equitable resource distribution.[10] In the Benin kingdom, the *Igun-Eronmwon* guild of bronze casters operated under royal patronage, producing ceremonial objects exclusively for the Oba and his courts. Guilds were often clan-based, with membership restricted to lineages believed to possess ancestral knowledge. For example, the Awka blacksmiths in Igboland permitted only male descendants to join because they are believed to possess ancestral metallurgical knowledge.[11]

The apprenticeship system in pre-colonial Nigeria was a cornerstone of entrepreneurship and skill acquisition. It was deeply rooted in the socio-cultural fabric of various ethnic groups such as the Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa communities.

---

[5] Daniel, Chukwuma N. "The Entrepreneurial Spirit off the Igbo: A Cultural Legacy from Pre-colonial Times to The Contemporary Era," *Journal of Igbo Language, Literature, Culture, and Religious Studies,* vol.1. No.2 (2025).

[6] Lai, Olurode. "Ifa, the Deity of Wisdom, and Importance of Work among the Yoruba People," *Journal of Enterprising Communities: People and Places in the Global Economy*, vol 1, no.2 (2007):134.

[7] Saidu, Nasiru." Development of Socio-Cultural Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Theory: Evidence from Three Major Ethnic Groups in Nigeria, Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo," *Journal of Business Administration and Entrepreneurship,* vol. 1, no.1(2024):12

[8] Ibid.

[9] Benjamin Uchenna A. "Precolonial Guild System in Igboland: The Example of Awka Blacksmith Guilds," *RUN Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol.2, 2018.

[10] Ekeocha, D. "Digital Entrepreneurship in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects," *African Journal of Management,* vol.7, no.2 (2021): 45-62.

[11] Joseph, Osagie. "Crafts Guilds and the Sustenance of Pre-colonial Benin Monarchy, *An International Journal of Arts and Humanities,* vol 4, no.1 (2015).

ISSN 2787-0308 (ONLINE)

This system involved young individuals learning trades, crafts, or professions under the guidance of experienced masters.[12] For instance, the Igbo apprenticeship system, known as *Igba boi*, was particularly notable for its role in fostering entrepreneurship. It was based on informal agreements between the apprentice and the master, often involving the apprentice living with the master to learn not only the trade but also the values and ethics associated with it. Upon completing the apprenticeship, the master would often provide the apprentice with startup capital or resources to establish their own business, thus perpetuating a cycle of economic empowerment.[13] Also, apprentices underwent rites to honour ancestral guild founders. For example, Yoruba weavers offered kolanuts to the deity *Ogun (*god of iron) before handling tools. A Benin bronze-casting apprentice might spend years learning wax modelling before attempting casting. In Kano, dyers gifted a specially dyed cloth to their mentors, symbolizing skill mastery.[14] This system was not specifically for commerce but extended to other crafts like farming, fishing, blacksmithing, and weaving.

British colonialism and Entrepreneurship in Nigeria

British colonialism restructured Nigeria's economy to serve imperial interests, disrupting indigenous entrepreneurship. During this period, indigenous economic systems were disrupted and reshaped by colonial policies, the introduction of new industries, and the global demand for raw materials.[15] Although entrepreneurship continued to thrive in some areas, significant challenges arose due to the restrictive and exploitative nature of colonial rule which redirected the economies towards cash crop production and mineral. Infrastructure projects, such as railways, served colonial interests, marginalizing local entrepreneurs.[16] Imported goods undermined traditional industries, though some Nigerians adapted by entering retail and transport sectors.[17]

The colonial economy was patterned to serve the dictates of the British empire, and intense concentration was placed on the extraction of natural resources such as palm oil, cocoa, groundnuts, and rubber for export. The indigenous entrepreneurs who were previously involved in these trades, were often relegated to subordinate roles, as colonial corporations dominated production and distribution. For example, the Royal Niger Company controlled trade routes and resources, significantly limiting opportunities for indigenous entrepreneurs.[18] Also, the introduction of a monetary economy destabilised the traditional systems of exchange and wealth accumulation. Taxes were levied on

[12] Anthony, Kanu, Timothy Dokpesi, et al., *Ethics, Entrepreneurship and Sustainable Development: Converging Perspectives and Insights (*Abuja: Veritas University Press, 2025)
[13] Robert, Eze M. "Assessment of the Igbo Apprenticeship System in Nigeria," *Journal of Social Theory and Research*, vol3, no.2(2023)
[14] Philip, Shea J. *The development of an Export-Oriented Dyed Cloth Industry in Kano Emirate in the Nineteenth Century*. (Madison: University of Wisconsin dissertation, 1975).
[15] Anthony, Kanu, Timothy Dokpesi, et al., *Ethics, Entrepreneurship and Sustainable Development: Converging Perspectives and Insights (*Abuja: Veritas University Press, 2025)
[16] Olufemi, Ekundare R. *An Economic History, 1860-1960*(London: Methuen and Co Ltd., 1973)
[17]Tom, Forrest. *Politics and Economic Development in Nigeria*(Boulder: Westview Press, 1993)
[18] Toyin, Falola. *Developing Planning and Decolonization in Nigeria* (Florida: University Press of Florida, 1996)

© humanusdiscourse@gmail.com , http://humanusdiscourse.website2.me

local communities, compelling many Nigerians to work as labourers in colonial industries to meet their tax obligations.

Colonial policies often hindered the growth of indigenous entrepreneurship. For instance, land tenure systems were altered to favour colonial enterprises, making it difficult for locals to acquire land for commercial purposes. Additionally, transportation infrastructure, such as railways and ports, was developed primarily to facilitate the export of raw materials rather than to support local trade.[19] For instance, these trade routes transported raw materials like iron ore, hide and skin, cotton, groundnut etc., used by Hausa's local craft industries to British industries and brought back finished goods, which replaced local craft industrial goods that eventually stagnated the operations of craft industries in Hausa.[20] Moreover, discriminatory practices limited access to capital and credit for indigenous entrepreneurs. Colonial banks and financial institutions primarily catered to European businesses, leaving Nigerian entrepreneurs reliant on informal savings and credit systems. The colonial period also brought cultural and social changes that influenced entrepreneurship. The introduction of Christianity and Western lifestyles altered traditional values and practices, leading to shifts in consumption patterns and business opportunities. For example, the demand for imported goods increased, creating a new market for retailers and middlemen who facilitated trade between colonial suppliers and local consumers.

The intent of the British colonial administration in Africa, like other European powers, was to protect commercial and strategic interests for the home country and to eliminate indigenous constraints of their commercial activities.[21] The people were dependent on cash and good advances from expatriate trading firms which had superior capital resources and possessed the monopoly control of banking and shipping facilities. The banks discriminated against Nigerian businessmen but favoured foreign ones. Furthermore, these foreign firms combined to regulate prices and pool their purchases together to discourage African traders or new entrants. In cases where Nigerians attempted to control markets and prices through combinations, like their foreign counterparts, they were penalised.[22] For instance, if a trader found a profitable new line, European companies would move quickly to drive them out of business.

Nigeria was completely subordinated to their European masters – ensured by foreign companies such as the Royal Niger Company, Miller Brothers, John Holt and Co., which became a limited company in 1897, Cheri Peyrissac in 1908, R. and W. King, founded at the close of the 17th century, followed suit in 1911; Maurel et Prom in 1919 and in the main, UAC in 1929.[23] There was also a move towards concentration where many small businesses were eliminated, and the survivors amalgamated to produce a handful of very large firms. In the Igbo palm

[19]Akin, Mabogunje I. *Urbanisation in Nigeria* (London: University of London Press, 1968)
[20] Saidu, Nasiru." Development of Socio-Cultural Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Theory: Evidence from Three Major Ethnic Groups in Nigeria, Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo," *Journal of Business Administration and Entrepreneurship,* vol. 1, no.1(2024):12
[21]Garvin, Williams. *State and Society in Nigeria* (Ondo: Afrografika Publishers, 1980)
[22]Tom, Forrest. *Politics and Economic Development in Nigeria*(Boulder: Westview Press, 1993)
[23] A.G Hopkins. *An Economic History of West Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1973).

© humanusdiscourse@gmail.com , http://humanusdiscourse.website2.me

oil trade by 1931, however, few rich Igbo individuals, with the colonial clientelistic set-up, had established capitalist forms.[24]

Conflicting arguments concerning the role of the expatriate trading firms began to rise. On the one hand, these firms have been accused of exploitation, a charge that has rarely been closely defined, and is certainly difficult to analyse. On the other hand, the expatriate firms have complained about African traders, alleging that there were too many of them, and that their presence reduced the profits not only the large firms themselves, but of African producers as well.[25] The idea of exploitation revolves around two recurrent themes: the first was that the large firms made excessive profits and second, that they eliminated an emerging generation of African merchants.

Despite the challenges, the colonial period witnessed the rise of small-scale businesses, particularly in urban areas. The influx of people into areas like Lagos, Kano, and Port-Harcourt created opportunities for petty trading, tailoring, carpentry, and other small enterprises. The Abokis the middlemen in the north and Ndi Ahia "traders" in the southeast thrived in retail and distributed European goods, often bypassing colonial restrictions.[26] The women in particular played an exceptional role in this sector, engaging in market trading and food processing.[27] An example is Omu Okwei, a woman trader in Onitsha who developed close commercial relations with the Niger Company by selling palm produce to the company and retailing imported goods. By the 1920s, she was diversifying her interests, putting money into property, investing in lorries and canoes, and making cash advances to other traders.[28] The Yorubas with their sense of traditional cooperative "Esusu" (savings club) became the first to establish modern cooperative entrepreneurial ecosystem with the establishment of Cocoa Producers' Cooperative of Agege Planters' Union and Egba Farmers' Union in Abeokuta and Ibadan in 1930 to drive sales of their cocoa produce to British colonialists.[29] The success of these two cooperatives prompted the colonial government to enact "Ordinance and Regulation" for the promotion of cooperatives in Nigeria in 1935 and appointed Mr E.F. Haig as the Registrar of Cooperative Societies in Nigeria.[30] As a result, several cooperatives were establishment such as Cooperative Thrift and Credit Societies (CTCS) in 1936, Gbedun Cooperative Society in the Western Region and to date cooperative society is the socio-cultural entrepreneurial ecosystem of Yoruba ethnic group in Nigeria. Also, the Agberos "motor park touts" emerged to manage logistics for colonial goods, later forming influential transport unions.

---

[24] Nzimiro I. "A Study of Mobility among the Ibos of Southern Nigeria," *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, vol.6, no.1 (1965).
[25] A.G Hopkins. *An Economic History of West Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1973).
[26] Sayre, SchatzP. *Nigerian Capitalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977)
[27] Johnson, M. "Women and Petty Trading in Colonial Nigeria," *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, vol.16,no.3(1982): 593-596.
[28] A.G Hopkins. *An Economic History of West Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1973).
[29] Saidu, Nasiru." Development of Socio-Cultural Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Theory: Evidence from Three Major Ethnic Groups in Nigeria, Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo," *Journal of Business Administration and Entrepreneurship,* vol. 1, no.1(2024):12a
[30] Ibid.

© humanusdiscourse@gmail.com , http://humanusdiscourse.website2.me

The emergence of these businesses demonstrated the resilience and adaptability of indigenous entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurs sought to navigate the colonial economy by leveraging their skills and networks to create livelihoods for themselves and their families.[31]

Entrepreneurship and Government Intervention in Post Independence Nigeria

The colonial government heralded and sustained the policy of exploitation and dependency for their selfish interest. Consequently, to reverse the situation, successive governments in Nigeria have adopted several strategies and policies towards entrepreneurship development by establishing institutions and agencies, which provide support services to entrepreneurs. The establishment of Nigeria Industrial Development Bank now Bank of Industry in 1964 represented one of the earliest government commitments towards entrepreneurship development in the country. This was followed by several other government initiatives and programmes.

Bank of Industry (former Nigeria Industrial Development Bank)

The Bank of Industry (BOI) is the oldest and largest development finance institution in Nigeria, focused on transforming the industrial sector. It was formed from the merger of the Nigerian Industrial Development Bank (NIDB), the Nigerian Bank for Commerce and Industry (NBCI), and the National Economic Reconstruction Fund (NERFUND). BOI provides financial and advisory support for establishing, expanding, diversifying, and modernizing industrial enterprises. BOI's roots trace back to the Investment Corporation of Nigeria (ICON) Limited in 1959, which later became the Nigerian Industrial Development Bank (NIDB) in 1964. BOI was officially established in 2001 through a merger of three key development finance institutions. BOI is owned and managed by the Federal Ministry of Finance. BOI's primary objective is to provide financial and non-financial support to industrial businesses in Nigeria. This includes: financing for the establishment of new industrial project;support for the expansion; diversification, and modernization of existing businesses; advisory services to help businesses succeed. BOI operates in all 36 states of Nigeria, ensuring widespread access to its services. BOI plays a crucial role in Nigeria's industrial development by facilitating investments and promoting private sector participation in key industries.

Industrial Training Fund

The Industrial Training Fund (ITF) was established in 1971 by the Nigerian government. Its main objective was to promote the development of skilled manpower to meet the growing needs of Nigeria's industrial sector. At the time, Nigeria faced a shortage of trained professionals in various industries.[32] The ITF

[31] Anthony, Kanu, Timothy Dokpesi, et al., *Ethics, Entrepreneurship and Sustainable Development: Converging Perspectives and Insights (*Abuja: Veritas University Press, 2025)
[32]Stephen Talabi Aroge, "Employee's Training and Development for Optimum Productivity: The Role of Industrial Training Fund (ITF), Nigeria," *Developing Country Studies* 2, no. 4 (2012): 79-88.

© humanusdiscourse@gmail.com , http://humanusdiscourse.website2.me

was created to bridge this gap by offering structured training programs and opportunities for Nigerians to acquire the necessary skills for employment in different sectors of the economy.

The ITF's mandate includes offering and overseeing training for individuals employed or seeking employment in industries and commerce. It also approves courses provided by external training facilities and carries out research into workforce development. Employers are required to provide documented training for their local staff and can claim refunds from the ITF based on the training they offer. The ITF encourages skills development through various programs that boost productivity and industrial growth.[33]

In 2011, the ITF Act was amended to strengthen its operations. One of the key changes was the reduction of the minimum number of employees required for an organization to contribute to the ITF from 25 to 5 employees or an annual turnover of ₦50 million. The contribution rate was set at 1% of the employer's payroll. However, the maximum refund employers could claim for providing training was reduced from 60% to 50% of their contribution. These changes aimed to increase compliance but also raised concerns about placing an additional burden on smaller businesses, which now had to contribute without receiving as much benefit in return.[34]

The ITF also plays a key role in education through programs like the Student Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES).[35] SIWES allows students from tertiary institutions to gain practical industry experience, bridging the gap between academic knowledge and the skills needed in the workforce. This initiative helps students in fields such as engineering, technology, and applied sciences gain the hands-on experience required for future employment. Over the years, the ITF has expanded its partnerships with businesses, local and international organizations, to enhance training and improve the country's human capital development.

Indigenization Decree (1972)

The Indigenization Decree was introduced by General Yakubu Gowon to transfer ownership of foreign businesses to Nigerians, promoting local entrepreneurship. It sought to empower Nigerians by increasing their participation in key sectors like retail, construction, and transport. However, many Nigerians lacked the skills and capital needed to manage these businesses effectively, leading to poor performance and the eventual failure of many

[33]Taiwo Oyedele, *What You Should Know and Do About the Industrial Training Fund (Amendment) Act 2011* (PwC Nigeria, February 2012).
[34]Industrial Training Fund (Amendment) Act 2011, Official Gazette No. 108, Vol. 98 (2011): 372-379.
[35]Levong S. Duktur, Barko Lohnan, and Yaknanbulus Cirfat, "Business Education and Industrial Training Fund (ITF) Collaboration for Manpower Training through Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES)," *Nigerian Journal of Business Education (NIGJBED)* 7, no. 1 (2020): 529-536.

enterprises. Despite this, the policy marked a significant push toward economic empowerment for Nigerians.[36]

Operation Feed the Nation (1976)

General Olusegun Obasanjo launched Operation Feed the Nation to boost food production and reduce reliance on imports. It encouraged youth and farmers to engage in agriculture, intending to create agricultural entrepreneurs. Though it raised awareness about food self-sufficiency and inspired some farming initiatives, the program's impact was short-lived due to poor execution and lack of ongoing support for farmers.[37] As a result, Nigeria's dependency on food imports continued to grow despite the initial promise of the program.

Green Revolution (1980)

President Shehu Shagari introduced the Green Revolution with the aim of increasing agricultural productivity and promoting self-sufficiency. The program sought to modernize farming techniques and foster agro-based industries. While the initial goals were ambitious and it brought some improvements in food production, the initiative was hampered by corruption, poor implementation, and insufficient funding.[38] Ultimately, the program failed to make a lasting impact, and Nigeria remained dependent on food imports.

The National Directorate of Employment

The National Directorate of Employment (NDE) was created in response to the economic challenges of the 1980s when Nigeria's economy entered a recession.[39] Established on March 26, 1986, following the recommendations of the Chukwuma Committee, it was tasked with addressing the rising unemployment crisis. The committee's findings indicated that the informal sector, characterized by low-skilled and semi-skilled labour, accounted for 90% of the Nigerian workforce, largely concentrated in agriculture and self-employment.[40] Recognizing this, the NDE was created to develop strategies aimed at mass employment creation, particularly by fostering self-employment and vocational skills development.

---

[36]Ebele M. Onwuka, Kelechi Enyinna Ugwu, and Agwu Ukpai Kalu, "The Effect of Policy Measures on Entrepreneurship Development: Analysis of Nigeria's Experience," *European Journal of Business and Management* 6, no. 23 (2014): 270-276.
[37]Emea O. Arua, "Achieving Food Sufficiency in Nigeria through the Operation 'Feed the Nation' Programme," *Agricultural Administration* 9, no. 2 (1982): 91-101.
[38]Herbert Ekwe-Ekwe, "The Nigerian Plight: Shagari to Buhari," *Third World Quarterly* 7, no. 3 (1985): 610-625.
[39]Mal. Abubakar Nuhu Fikpo, *"The Role of the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) in Preparing Nigerian Undergraduates for the Larger Society,"* (paper presented at The Federal University Lokoja, Felele, Kogi State, April 3, 2024), accessed October 8, 2024, https://www.fulokoja.edu.ng/assets/media/docs/the-role-of-the-national-directorate-of-employment-nde-in-preparing-nigerian-undergraduate-for-the-larger-society-by-nde-dg-mal-abubakar-nuhu-fikpo_1713283465.pdf.
[40]National Directorate of Employment, "About NDE," accessed October 8, 2024, https://nde.gov.ng/about-duplicate/.

The NDE received legal authority through its enabling Act, CAP 250 of the Laws of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (previously known as Decree No. 24 of 1989). This Act gave the NDE the power to create policies and run programs designed to reduce unemployment.[41] The agency's programs were launched nationwide in 1987, focusing on sectors such as vocational training, small-scale enterprises, and rural employment. The NDE's core responsibilities include designing policies to combat mass unemployment, providing vocational and technical skills training, promoting entrepreneurship, and enhancing agricultural productivity through its Rural Employment Promotion (REP) scheme.

A major development came in 1999 when the Ahmed Joda Committee streamlined the activities of various poverty alleviation agencies in Nigeria, allowing the NDE to focus on training for job creation.[42] The agency's programs were restructured to prioritize skills development and entrepreneurship training over direct employment creation, ensuring that beneficiaries gained marketable skills for self-reliance. Key initiatives include the Vocational Skills Development (VSD) program, Small Scale Enterprises (SSE) program, and Special Public Works (SPW) program. The SPW program, in particular, has provided temporary employment opportunities to mitigate the effects of economic downturns and address unemployment in critical periods.

In addition to these efforts, the NDE plays a vital role in preparing Nigerian undergraduates for the workforce by equipping them with employability skills. The NDE offers various schemes such as the National Open Apprenticeship Scheme and the Sustainable Agricultural Development Training Scheme, which provide practical skills and entrepreneurial knowledge to youths and undergraduates.[43] These initiatives aim to bridge the gap between academic learning and the demands of the labour market, fostering self-employment, business ownership, and increased productivity across sectors. The NDE also collaborates with universities and other institutions to promote vocational training and entrepreneurship, encouraging undergraduates to acquire skills that will enhance their employability and societal contributions.

Better Life for Rural Women (1987)

Maryam Babangida, wife of General Ibrahim Babangida, initiated the Better Life for Rural Women program to empower rural women by providing access to

[41]Muhammad Ahmad Garba, "Effects of Vocational Skill Development Programme of the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) on Youths Employment in Kaduna State," *AKSU Journal of Administration and Corporate Governance (AKSUJACOG)* 2, no. 4 (2022): 68-81

[42]Chukwuemeka U. Okoye, "Sustaining Poverty Alleviation Efforts through Inter-Agency Collaboration in Nigeria," in *National Conference and Exhibition on Poverty Alleviation*, (2006), 1-18.

[43]Mal. Abubakar Nuhu Fikpo, *"The Role of the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) in Preparing Nigerian Undergraduates for the Larger Society,"* (paper presented at The Federal University Lokoja, Felele, Kogi State, April 3, 2024), accessed October 8, 2024, https://www.fulokoja.edu.ng/assets/media/docs/the-role-of-the-national-directorate-of-employment-nde-in-preparing-nigerian-undergraduate-for-the-larger-society-by-nde-dg-mal-abubakar-nuhu-fikpo_1713283465.pdf

© humanusdiscourse@gmail.com , http://humanusdiscourse.website2.me

loans, training, and small business opportunities. The program raised awareness of the economic potential of women and helped create women's cooperatives across Nigeria.[44] However, inconsistent funding and weak follow-up meant that many of these women could not sustain their businesses, limiting the overall success of the initiative despite its early promise.

Peoples Bank of Nigeria (1989)

The Peoples Bank was established by General Ibrahim Babangida to provide small loans to low-income Nigerians who could not access regular banking services. It was meant to support petty traders, artisans, and small-scale farmers by giving them affordable credit to grow their businesses.[45] Although the bank initially provided much-needed capital to many underserved Nigerians, poor loan recovery rates, mismanagement, and widespread corruption led to its collapse after only a few years of operation.

Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) (1997)

General Sani Abacha introduced the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) to alleviate poverty by providing rural families with credit to start small businesses, particularly in agriculture. The program offered some success in the early stages by increasing access to credit in rural areas and supporting micro-enterprises.[46] However, after Abacha's death, the program suffered from poor continuity, and many of the loans were not repaid, leading to its eventual decline and minimal long-term impact on poverty reduction.

National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) (2003)

This was launched by President Olusegun Obasanjo in 2003. NEEDS was a comprehensive policy aimed at poverty reduction, wealth creation, and employment generation. One of its core components was entrepreneurship development, through the support of MSMEs. NEEDS focused on creating an enabling environment for businesses by addressing infrastructure gaps and improving access to finance.[47]

SMEDAN (2003)

The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) was also established by President Obasanjo to promote the development of

[44]Afolabi Mojirayo and Adeyemo Oladapo, "Information Literacy and Women Empowerment for National Development: The Role of First Ladies in Nigeria," *African Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research* 4, no. 3 (2021): 1-13
[45]John C. Anyanwu and U. B. Uwatt, "Banking for the Poor: The Case of the People's Bank of Nigeria," *African Review of Money, Finance and Banking* (1993): 87-103.
[46]C. P. O. Obinne, "The Family Economic Advancement Programme in Nigeria: A Rural Development Approach," *Community Development Journal* 34, no. 3 (1999): 252-254.
[47]Sunday Abayomi Adebisi, Abiodun Adebowale Oyedele, and Christo Gbenga Adelakun, "Appraising the Efficacy of the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) as Policy Intervention in Nigeria (2003-2007)," *International Journal of Economic Behavior (IJEB)* 9, no. 1 (2019): 67-83.

MSMEs by providing capacity-building programs and improving access to finance. SMEDAN has helped many small businesses formalize and access loans, and it has contributed to policy reforms supporting MSMEs. However, the agency was criticized for bureaucratic delays and inefficiencies, which slowed the delivery of services to small business owners, limiting its overall impact.[48]

YouWin! (2011)

President Goodluck Jonathan established the YouWin! programme to support young entrepreneurs by providing business grants to start or expand their businesses. The initiative successfully funded different startups across Nigeria, leading to job creation and increased innovation among youth. However, the program was limited by its short duration, as it ended after only a few rounds of funding. Additionally, there were cases of mismanagement of funds, leading to a reduced effectiveness of the initiative.[49]

SURE-P (2012)

The Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Program (SURE-P) was launched by President Jonathan after the partial removal of fuel subsidies to reinvest the savings into social programs, including entrepreneurship support. SURE-P focused on creating jobs, vocational training, and youth empowerment. While it created temporary employment and provided training for many young Nigerians, the program was marred by allegations of corruption and poor management. It failed to achieve lasting reductions in unemployment and poverty.[50]

NYSC Skill Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development (SAED) (2012)

The NYSC Skill Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development (SAED) program was introduced under President Jonathan's administration to equip graduates with entrepreneurial skills during their National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) year. The program has successfully trained thousands of young Nigerians in various trades, helping to reduce graduate unemployment by encouraging self-employment. However, SAED faces challenges with post-training support, as many graduates struggle to transition their skills into viable businesses after completing their service year.[51]

---

[48]Oluseyi O. Oduyoye, Solomon A. Adebola, and Adekunle O. Binuyo, "Services of Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) and Small Business Survival in Ogun State, Nigeria," *Singaporean Journal of Business Economics and Management Studies* 1, no. 11 (2013): 31-43.
[49]ICIR, "Finance Ministry Uncovers Massive Fraud in YOUWIN," 2017. https://www.icirnigeria.org/finance-ministry-uncovers-massive-fraud-in-youwin/.
[50]E. Tochukwu, "Government Social Intervention and Job Creation in Nigeria: A Study of SURE-P and N-POWER Programmes, 2012–2018," *Global Journal of Human-Social Science* 19, no. 7 (2019): 41-50.
[51]M. T. Deebom and D. I. Taylor, "The Influence of National Youth Service Corps Entrepreneurship Skill Acquisition Programmes on Youth Empowerment in Rivers State," *International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education (IJHSSE)* 7, no. 6 (2020): 146-155.

N-Power (2016)

President Buhari's N-Power initiative was launched as part of the National Social Investment Program to address youth unemployment by providing skills development and entrepreneurship training. The program helped reduce youth unemployment by placing thousands of graduates in temporary jobs in various sectors, including agriculture, education, and technology. However, the jobs were temporary, and there have been concerns about the lack of permanent employment opportunities for participants once they complete the program.[52]

TraderMoni (2018)

TraderMoni was introduced by President Muhammadu Buhari as part of the National Social Investment Program to provide small, interest-free loans to petty traders. The initiative was aimed at boosting small-scale entrepreneurship and helping traders grow their businesses. It was successful in reaching a wide number of low-income Nigerians, particularly women. However, the loan amounts were criticized as being too small to make a meaningful difference in long-term business growth, and many recipients struggled to repay even these small amounts.[53]

FarmerMoni (2018)

This programme was also introduced under President Buhari's administration. FarmerMoni provided microloans to small-scale farmers to help them improve their agricultural productivity and grow their agribusinesses. While the program offered vital support to many rural farmers, helping to increase food production in some areas, access to funds remained a challenge for many, particularly those in remote locations. Additionally, repayment rates were low, and the initiative suffered from poor monitoring, limiting its overall effectiveness. Similar low repayment also affected other agricultural empowerment schemes such as the Anchors borrowers' programme.[54]

Presidential Grant and Loan Scheme (2023)

President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's administration launched the Presidential Grant and Loan Scheme to provide financial support to manufacturers, MSMEs, and nano businesses across Nigeria. The programme was aimed to disburse funds to over 700,000 verified beneficiaries, with over 660,000 nano businesses having already received funds as of September 2023. The scheme has a budget of N200 billion and provides grants of N50,000 to nano businesses.[55]

---

[52]Glory Chika Olorunfemi and Ojiakor Samson Egwuma, "Impact of the N-Power Program on Poverty Alleviation in Enugu State, Nigeria (2016-2020)," *African Journal of Social and Behavioural Sciences* 14, no. 5 (2024): 2094-2116.

[53]Sambo Abubakar, "Trader Moni Micro-Credit Scheme and Poverty Reduction in Nigeria," *International Journal of Political Science* 1, no. 2 (2019): 38-42.

[54]Bedru B. Balana and Motunrayo A. Oyeyemi, "Agricultural Credit Constraints in Smallholder Farming in Developing Countries: Evidence from Nigeria," *World Development Sustainability* 1 (2022): 1-12.

[55]Aghogho Udi, "FG to Begin Disbursement of Presidential Loans and Grant to Manufacturers, MSMEs in September," *Nairametrics*, August 2024, https://nairametrics.com/2024/08/19/fg-to-begin-disbursement-of-presidential-loans-and-grant-to-manufacturers-msmes-in-september/.

© humanusdiscourse@gmail.com , http://humanusdiscourse.website2.me

ISSN 2787-0308 (ONLINE)

Conclusion

We have shown in this paper that successive governments in Nigeria since 1960 have contributed towards entrepreneurship development in the country through the introduction of policies and programmes.These programmes were established to provide training skills, financial assistance, and relevant information for entrepreneurs to benefit thereby removing the constraints they face and expand the frontiers of opportunities available to them. This article also supports the argument that a government policy or programme on entrepreneurship development when properly implemented can lead to entrepreneurship development, which in turn results in economic growth, employment generation and sustainable development. However, it is important to note that the gains from such government efforts have not been maximised due to several challenges including; bad governance, insecurity and harmful cultural practices; faulty designs of some of the programmes; over concentration of these programmes in urban areas; high cost of doing business in Nigeria and corruption. Nevertheless, with sustained political will, adequate resources and spread of the programmes as well as strong institutions Nigeria will overcome these challenges militating against entrepreneurship development in the country.

© humanusdiscourse@gmail.com , http://humanusdiscourse.website2.me